

## **Montana's Public Schools: Striving for Educational Excellence**

### **Improve Graduation Rates**

Graduation rates have improved from 80.7 percent in 2009 to 83.3 percent in 2012. The dropout rate has decreased from 5 percent in 2009 to 4.1 percent in 2012.

- In 2010, Supt. Juneau launched Graduation Matters Montana, a statewide initiative engaging schools, communities, businesses and families in a focused effort to ensure students graduate prepared for college and the workforce. Seventy percent of students currently attend a school with a Graduation Matters initiative.
- The 2013 Legislature invested \$1M in Career and Technical Education Student Programs. Students in Montana who take three or more CTE courses have a graduation rate of 96.2 percent.

### **Increase College-Going and Decrease College Remediation Rates**

College-going rates have increased from 57 percent in 2008 to 61 percent in 2010. In 2012, 61 percent of Montana seniors took the ACT, up from 59 percent in 2011. Remediation rates have decreased from 29.4 percent in 2009 to 28.5 percent in 2012. In 2012, 9.4 percent of students were placed into remedial writing courses, and 24.9 percent were placed into remedial math courses.

- Montana raised its standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. These standards are higher and clearer than our current standards, aligned with college and workforce expectations and designed to ensure our students are learning the skills they need to be competitive in a global economy.
- Through Montana's GEAR UP grant, the OPI is providing the ACT to every public school junior at no cost to their families for the next five years. Universal ACT access has been shown to increase the percent of students who enroll in higher education.
- The OPI and Commissioner of Higher Education are working together to increase the number of high school students who graduate with college credit. In 2011, Montana ranked 37th in the nation with only three percent of the enrollments in higher education attributed to students under 18 years old.

### **Reduce Achievement Gaps and Assist Struggling Schools**

The achievement gap is a term used to describe the persistent gaps between the academic achievements of different groups of children in the United States. In Montana, this term applies predominately to the achievement levels of American Indian students as compared to white students in the state. American Indians, on average, face higher dropout rates, lower test scores, take fewer college preparatory and advanced placement (AP) classes, and have lower graduation rates.

- The OPI has engaged in unprecedented efforts in three communities to turn around the state's lowest-performing schools, which has resulted in increases in the average state test (CRT) scores of all participating schools in Reading, Math and Science.
- The OPI has assisted in training school districts in implementing the Response to Intervention (RTI) strategy. RTI emphasizes the importance of: local school principals as instructional leaders, the use of data to guide instruction, appropriate intervention and practice, parent involvement, and research-based practices.
- More than 10,000 students are benefitting from a \$7M Striving Readers grant, which is focused on reducing achievement gaps and improving literacy skills in 29 schools and five Head Start programs.
- The OPI has initiated wraparound services to address children's mental, physical and emotional needs in its Schools of Promise communities of Frazer, Lame Deer, Wyola and Pryor and received four years of funding to continue to support these services and expand to additional communities.

### **Provide High-Quality Instruction**

Many factors contribute to a student's academic performance; however, research shows that when it comes to school-related factors, having a quality teacher in the classroom is the most important factor for students' academic achievement.

- Recent changes to Montana's accreditation standards include expanded requirements for high-quality teacher and principal evaluations and mentoring of teachers. In Montana, we have worked with teachers and school leaders to develop a high-quality evaluation tool that examines the complex activities of teaching and learning and focuses on the impact that effective teaching practices will have on student performance.
- The 2013 Legislature approved an appropriation of \$500,000 for mentoring and induction programs for Montana teachers. Half of educators leave the profession within the first five years. Mentoring has proven to be an effective strategy for retention as well as improved instruction.
- OPI's new data warehouse improves transparency and access to education data for parents and the public. Increased access to and use of data is allowing more individualized instruction and support services for students by teachers and administrators.

### **Promote Innovation and Provide Flexibility**

Local control of Montana's public schools is guaranteed in the Montana constitution. At the state level, the OPI has made strides to provide additional flexibility to schools, enabling them to innovate to meet the needs of their communities while still meeting the high standards families have come to expect from our public schools.

- Under Supt. Juneau's direction, Montana's accreditation standards were updated to include standards for performance. The new standards also allow schools to apply for flexibility from accreditation standards by proposing alternative or innovative strategies that will make schools more efficient, make learning more effective and reflect their communities' priorities and needs.
- The Montana Digital Academy is currently serving nearly 4,000 students. The MTDA is providing students in rural schools access to elective courses never before available and students in urban schools with improved access to credit recovery courses.

- Montana has provided the greatest degree of flexibility for schools to plan their school day and school calendar by setting a requirement for the minimum number of hours of pupil instruction for elementary and high school programs rather than setting a requirement for days. This flexibility has allowed Montana's small, rural schools to adopt a four day school week.
- Montana is a national leader in creating content for and integrating Indian Education for All into classrooms.
- Flexibility and creativity within our public school system has allowed more than fifty alternative schools to flourish in every corner of the state. Innovative programs include the Career Center in Billings, a Montessori Elementary School in Helena and health science academies in several of our largest school districts.

### **Support Student Health and Safety**

It is critical for students to focus all their energy on learning when they're in the classroom. A positive learning environment where students are healthy and feel safe and connected to their school is a key component to ensuring our students succeed.

- Schools in Montana serve 80,000 lunches and 24,000 breakfasts every day. Half of the lunch meals and two thirds of the breakfast meals are served free or at a reduced price. The OPI is working to expand access to breakfast programs and summer meals programs and has made participation easier through a new enrollment system.
- In order to provide nutritious, healthy meals and to support Montana's agricultural economy, the OPI is working to expand Farm to School programs and work with local producers, processors, and school food service managers to reduce barriers to bringing local food into our public schools.
- On July 1, 2013, a new rule regarding anti-bullying policies went into effect. The Student Protections Procedures rule requires schools to address bullying and threatening behavior in schools, on school buses, at school-sponsored activities, and online.
- Currently, 189 schools are part of the Montana Behavior Initiative, and thousands of teachers and school leaders have participated in MBI trainings. MBI is a proactive approach in creating behavioral supports and a social culture that establishes social, emotional, and academic success for all students.
- OPI and the Dept. of Health and Human Services work together to prevent major health problems and reduce risky behaviors among youth. Data available from OPI and DPHHS which track trends in health and behaviors include: the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and the Montana Prevention Needs Assessment Survey.